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THE MULTIETHNIC SOVIET UNION AND ITS DEMISE, By Ayse Dietrich*, Published by: Bloomsbury Academic, Written by Brigid O’Keeffe, Year of Publishing: 2023. Subject Area: Soviet Union, Multiethnic empire, Book Type: Russian History and Politics. Total Number of Pages: 134. ISBN: 9781350136779, paperback, \$17,95.

Imperial Russia was often described as a “prison house of nations” as put by Lenin. Non-Russian ethnicities all suffered from some form of legal or cultural discrimination in the empire.

When the Bolsheviks came to power, they introduced a policy called *Korenizatsiya* (indigenization, nativization) in such a volatile region, where members of society still clung on to the bad memories of an oppressive empire to reduce the hostility among the large non-Russian ethnic groups whose rights had been ignored by the authorities during the empire, to raise the cultural level of the backward people to the level of the Russian, to cultivate communist cadres for every nationality, to make Soviet power attractive to non-Russians by presenting it in their own language and by giving them an incentive to participate in the new system.

This book is about the revolutionaries, the Bolsheviks who seized power after the collapse of the empire and built the first socialist state in the world in a multiethnic environment, and the policies and ideological principles that shaped the Soviet Union as a multiethnic empire. O’Keeffe examines why ethnic diversity was fundamental to the nature of the Soviet Union and how it was governed, how the people of the multiethnic Soviet Union were shaped and why this multiethnic structure collapsed in 1991.

The book composed of seven chapters. In the first chapter the O’Keeffe talks about the revolutionaries, and states that questions of ethnicity were never the Bolsheviks’ first concern as Marxists since the Bolsheviks who carried out the October Revolution themselves represented the diversity of the multiethnic, multilingual, and multiconfessional tsarist empire; even its leader Vladimir Lenin’s family had Russian, Jewish, German, Swedish, and Kalymk origins, his comrade Leon Trotsky’s family had Jewish roots and Joseph Stalin was Georgian. She talks about how the

Soviets dealt with the backwardness, how they embraced this multiethnic population and united it; mobilized it for the building of socialism; and transformed the backward and illiterate peoples of the empire into integrated Soviet citizens.

In the second chapter, the author examines the fundamental principles of Soviet life and discusses how and why the Soviets focused on ethnicity, how their obsessiveness with ethnicity question shaped the course of Soviet history and the fates of the peoples until the end of the Soviet Union in 1991. She talks about the policies the Bolsheviks exercised in non-Russian areas and states that at the very beginning the Bolsheviks believed that their ethnic policies had to attract non-Russian peoples to serve Bolshevik aims so that they would not face a nationalist revolt against them and at the same time to use them in the service of building socialism to create communist unity through a strategic nationality policy that would later transform the various nationalities into a fraternal union of freely federated Soviet Republics of Russia. She states that for the Soviets, ethnic diversity was a source of pride and a strength, and a reflection of the righteousness of the ideology of Soviet socialism.

In the third chapter, the author discusses the Soviet Union's ethnic politics and what it meant in the lives of Soviet citizens in the building of socialism. She states that without mobilizing the diverse population of the former tsarist empire, the Bolsheviks could never have achieved their revolutionary goals. The author explores the varied experiences of different ethnic groups and individuals during the Bolsheviks' aggressive pursuit of their revolutionary agenda.

In the fourth chapter, the author focuses on the multiethnic Soviet Union at war and under postwar reconstruction under Stalin, the ethnic dimensions of both Soviet unity and disunity during WWII, the Great Patriotic War that created a powerful force for unifying the Soviet people in a shared sense of purpose and belonging, that fractured the multiethnic Soviet people along ethnic lines. The author also discusses Russo-centric patriotism, ethnic cleansing and deportations of non-Russian people.

In the fifth chapter, the author explores the Friendship of Peoples as it was lived by Soviet citizens in the postwar era and as it was shaped by the geopolitical climate of the Cold War. She states that as Soviet society matured, so did some of the tensions implanted in the Soviet's ethnic politics such as homegrown racism that flourished in the postwar era causing resentments and fissures that threatened to destabilize the multiethnic structure of the Soviet Union.

The sixth chapter discusses how Gorbachev's glasnost, perestroika and democratization policies that were implemented to set a wide-ranging transformation of the Soviet Union's politics, economy, and society in 1987 produced opportunities for nationalist movements in the republics, and dynamited the already lagging Soviet economy, radically destabilized society, and shook the foundations of the Soviet Union among them, the so-called Friendship of Peoples.

The seventh chapter examines the failure of Gorbachev's reforms, how the Soviet Union was dismantled from within, how Soviet ethnic politics failed to support the Soviet state that was under the strain of Gorbachev's destabilizing reform plan and how they facilitated the Soviet Union's fracturing along national lines.

The book is a well-written work that presents an analysis of the multiethnic structure of the Soviet

Union and its dissolution. The primary audience for this reference book are researchers and academicians who are interested in the field of Soviet Union's ethnic politics.

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